FACES from the POPULAR PLAYS

JOHN BARRYMORE in "REDEMPTION"

FRANCES STARR in "TIGER! TIGER!"

MME. KALICH in "THE RIDDLE; WOMAN"

FAY BAINTER in "EAST IS WEST."

MRS. FISKE in "MIS' NELLY of N'ORLEANS"

HELEN MENKEN in "3 WISE FOOLS"

HELEN HAYES in "DEAR BRUTUS"

FRANK BACON in "LIGHTNIN'"

By LAWRENCE REAMER.

THE process by which "The Royal Vagabond" was made safe for the theatre's democracy, might almost serve as a series of "don'ts" for the writers of libretti. All in the average comic opera that has come in the course of time to be a burden to the flesh has disappeared. There is not a solo in the work. Even a duet between two lovers in the first act, is converted into a trio by the participation of a third singer, who pipes in harmony from a convenient balcony. In the whole score, there are practically none other than what are known in the theatre's slang as "ensemble numbers." They may begin harmlessly enough as solos or duets or even trios. But before the second line has been reached, the chorus has made its appearance and the number soon belongs to it. As the duty of this chorus is not only to sing, but to dance moreover with skill, it may well be seen that there can be no lack of movement in "The Royal Vagabond."

Thus has "Cohanization" applied to comic opera had beneficial results. For years some man or woman in an operetta has stepped down to the footlights and sung with all the bel canto that is in him or her a solo—"romances" they are usually called—which are so soporific and tedious as, to utilize the phraseology of the rural journal, to throw a gloom over the audience. The singer has the time of his or her life. There is no limit to his enjoyment. He throws out his best notes, lingers on them lovingly and drags out every tone until it seems as if the thing has lasted an eternity. Then having negotiated with more or less success a top note, he is willing to call things off.

Two men in particular used to flourish in comic opera doing just this sort of thing. The punishment was indeed cruel and inhuman to the listeners, but it was several years before the managers finally awoke to the fact that audiences were simply shrivelling up under the artistic ministrations of these solo vocalists. Ultimately they were canned by some discerning impresario, but not before they had cost him thousands of dollars. Women who do this sort of thing are more harmless. The rules of comic opera on some points are so strict that they must at least possess an average of loveliness. So one may look at them and try to forget the manner in which the auditory nerve is harassed.

Of course there are beautiful and melodious numbers in the best of the operettas that it would be a privation to lose. But they must in the first place be worth hearing. The tenor's madrigal in the second act of "The Gondoliers" is too exquisite to be spoiled by any singer, and *Rosalinde's* czardas in "The Bat" is just as indispensable to any lover of operetta music. They are but two of many exquisitely melodious and appealing solos in the field of comic opera writing. Nobody wants them Cohanized. But they never would be. It is only the pretentious efforts to be seriously musical, or dull passages to reveal the ambitions of the composer or the singer that one can see with sweet resignation altogether Cohanized out of existence. It is such numbers that have brought comic opera into disrepute and made the bridge ready for her informal half sister, the review, to cross over.

In the matter of the text, "Cohanization" has been equally effective. Anybody who saw "Fiddlers Three" knows what sort of an operetta book William Cary Duncan is capable of writing. It is not sure that any degree of Cohanization could have saved that derelict. But in general, a good old fashioned story with the qualities that operetta used to possess in the days of Offenbach and his contemporaries is what the managers frequently hold out as inducement to the public. If there were a genius like Offenbach to write the music there might be some demand for the same sort of text. But the old fashioned, romantic fable of the kind invariably brought out when the manager promises a return to the golden days of comic opera deserves to be "Cohanized" the minute it shows its head. Usually the indifference of the public is more cruel. The other method of salvaging what may be saved is much more generous to the manager who has passed through the brief stage of misguided ambition that seems to seize all of them once or twice in a career. Mr. Cohan has given them an excellent object lesson in first aid under such distressing conditions. None of them is safe from this ambition every once in a while to give an old fashioned opera comique. It seized every manager at intervals. Not only they but every librettist who contemplates a new work might benefit by studying the new Cohan "Dont's for Comic Opera."

The New York stage is just at the minute littered with beds. This does not imply that its movement is sluggish. Just at the present writing the theatre is not only uncommonly active, but highly prosperous, and, if possible, a little more trivial, ignorant and vulgar than ever before. Of course the unusual assemblage of so many beds at one time in various theatres may not be as ugly a sign as it seems. The outbreak of these plays of suggestion, and sometimes much more, is periodic. Just now it is said to be felt in other countries. In Paris the theatre managers, unable to find in the contemporary supply all the piquancy they need to satisfy the public, have begun to revive the most famous pieces of this kind of former days. It has been found that however plays may change in other particulars, the quality of lubricity is as potent to entertain in one generation as in another.

It is to be hoped for the stage of Paris, London, Hongkong, Buenos Ayres or wherever else this taste is at the minute dominating that the supply may be superior to that which the impresarios of this city are offering. Such amateurish specimens of play writing as, for instance, "Please Get Married" and "A Sleepless Night" would be impossible were it not for the special appeal they contain. Inevitably the writers who report the opening performance of these pieces are appalled at the lack of education which every line of them reveals. To the dramatist the awkwardness with which they are constructed must be equally surprising.

Evidently everybody concerned in the performance of such farces with the exception of the playwrights must know his business. If the beds were built with as little skill as the plays they would collapse long before the important second act began. If the actors showed no more knowledge of their metier than the dramatists disclose they would stumble over their feet and mutter unintelligently. To judge from such specimens of native farce, there is only one department of the American theatre in which technique is not needed. The dramatist alone is not compelled to know anything about his craft.

If this demand for the farce of philandering is to continue the managers might at least take the trouble to turn to that stage which has produced these works in their greatest perfection. There are numerous plays of this kind in the French theatre which ought to be able to furnish the same kind of amusement, however more expert and finished they may be. There is a literature of these pieces by the French dramatists which would be fresh to the American public. They would, however, be something more than fresh. They would be more skilful, more entertaining, more facile and in every way an improvement over the crude stuff that seems all our managers can find to-day. If such material is indispensable to supply the needs of their patrons they might at least start out for the best.

It might incidentally be noted that the best or the worst, to vary the estimate according to the ethics or the workmanship of these pieces, would be found more readily adaptable to the stage of the day than they would have been ten years ago. The advance of liberality in the public view of such matters has been remarkable during that time.

TOBY OF THE BOW.

JOHN TAINTOR FOOTE, the new dramatist, who has recently given New York that delectable person—Toby—of the comedy "Toby's Bow," says that up to a couple of years ago the real Toby lived down in Virginia. It was while in the South racing a horse that Mr. Foote first saw the real Toby.

Mr. Foote was the guest of a school chum. The family had an old negro servant called Toby.

Toby, says Mr. Foote, had a peculiar way of bowing to my boy friend, his father, mother and sister, but to no one else.

"I asked Toby one day what the bow meant and he said it was his way of showing his respect to 'de famlee.' I tried in every way to get the old fellow to bow in 'de famlee' manner to me. I gave him more tips than was good for him but without success.

"I had an old pair of riding boots that Toby admired very much and for the gift of which he would throw me a gentle hint almost every day. I couldn't learn what he wanted them for or to what use he intended putting them, but on my leaving I gave him the boots, thinking 'Surely, I'll get that bow now'—but no bow!"

"Tobby's Bow" is Mr. Foote's first play, but he is the author of several successful books. One, "The Look of Eagles," is a book about a horse—most charmingly and feelingly done. Another, "Dumb-bell of Brookfield," is about a wonderful setter. Horses and dogs Mr. Foote has known and loved from boyhood.

"Horses and dogs go together," says Mr. Foote, "and Dumb-bell was my own setter. My father had a large estate in Mount Vernon, Ohio, where I was born. We always had a large stable of racing horses and a number of setter dogs were my particular pride. One morning when I was about eighteen on going into the yard I found a litter containing what I thought was six puppies, but stored away in one corner so small that I could have held five that size in my palm, was the runt—later named Dumb-bell on account of a peculiar marking on his side.

"At that the runt was the only one that lived out of the litter of seven. When Dumb-bell was about a year old I lost him. About a year later the sportsmen in that part of the country kept hearing tales about a wonderful setter in Kulbuck, Ohio, about one hundred miles from Mount Vernon. This setter was reported to be a wonder at going down wind, running like fire; could stiffen in the middle of a sound; could twist himself in the air and light rigid at a bevy of quail a hundred feet away.

"Well, two or three months later, I happened to be down in Kulbuck and looked up this wonder. No more surprised man ever lived than I was that day, for there was the runt, a little longer but still a runt among his kind—and the little cuss knew me. I bought him back of course. I could have proved ownership, but as the chap that raised him had also trained him, I thought he was entitled to something. I kept Dumb-bell until he died of old age."

OFFERINGS OF THE WEEK.

TO-NIGHT—Century Theatre: A benefit will be given for the Camp Upton Athletic Fund, to be used in building a gymnasium and providing athletic supplies for soldiers at the cantonment. Among the performers, who have volunteered are Sophie Tucker, Alice Brady, Harry Fox, Joseph Santley, Ivy Sawyer, the Dolly Sisters, Fritzi Scheff, Johnny Dooley and Marie Carroll.

Belasco Theatre: An entertainment under the auspices of the Stage Women's War Relief will be presented for the benefit of the fund to maintain the theatre for wounded soldiers at Debarkation Hospital No. 5. David Belasco, in "A Star Overnight," will make his motion picture debut; Julia Arthur and Frances Starr will appear in a one act play, and other footlight celebrities to appear will be the Coburns, George M. Cohan, William Collier and Bessie McCoy Davis.

MONDAY—Theatre du Vieux Colombier: "Twelfth Night" will be revived.

THURSDAY—Republic Theatre: Marjorie Rambeau will be presented by Arthur Hopkins, in "The Fortune Teller," a new play by Leighton Graves Osmun. In the cast are Hugh Dillman, Robert Vaughan, E. L. Fernandez, Grace Goodall, Eleanor Montell, Edna Archer Crawford, Winifred Wellington and Irene Shirley.

LIGHT IN "DEAR BRUTUS."

"THE strictest and most careful personal attention to every detail—even the smallest and apparently the most insignificant."

Some one had asked David Belasco to what he attributed his wonderful success as a play producer and that was his answer.

There are hundreds of little things done on the stage in every performance that the audience never notices. But just let one of those little things be omitted or be done wrong—then the audience will notice.

There are the light effects in "Dear Brutus," for instance. How many of the thousands who have seen the new Barrie comedy at the Empire Theatre since William Gillette began his engagement in it there just before Christmas have ever realized consciously that there were any light effects? A few, perhaps, but only a few. And yet as much time almost was spent getting the lights just right as in rehearsing the company. From the moment the stage manager calls "Clear!" until the final curtain falls the electricians never have their hands off the switches intrusted to their care. There is hardly a moment in the entire play that the lighting of the stage is not undergoing some change, and yet it is all so natural, so exactly as it ought to be, that he audience doesn't even notice it.

The curtain ascends on a dark room, dimly lighted by a ray of light that shines through a door at the left. At the back is a wide open window that looks out upon a rose garden bathed in brilliant moonlight. The door at the left opens, more lights go up, a group of women enter, one of them finds the switch and suddenly the room is full of light. Later on the curtains at the back are closed, shutting out the view of the moonlit garden, and then ever so gradually the lights begin to grow dimmer until at last, when the curtains are opened again, the room is almost dark and the magic wood that has been mysteriously dropped down into the garden stands out filled with weird, mystic light. The guests, one by one, go out into the wood, leaving the impish *Lob* alone. He turns off the switch, the room is black again and his figure alone is discernible, silhouetted against the window.

But the chief light effects of "Dear Brutus" come, of course, in the second act which shows the magic Forest of Might-have-been. Old trees tower out of vision. It is a mystical place and its eerie qualities are triumphs entirely of the art of the painter and the electrician. The difficulties of obtaining the necessary effects in this scene were many. There are three comedy scenes played in this act and comedy cannot effectively be played in the dark.

Too much light would rob the wood of its soft coloring and destroy its mystical atmosphere. After much experimenting an arrangement was devised by which lights were thrown only on the figures of the actors taking part in the scene, there being no diffusion, but concentration of the rays. These lights grow dimmer as the action proceeds until Mr. Gillette, as the artist, leaves the stage and the darkness becomes noticeable and the trees, now lighted as if by the moon begin to stand out with distinctness. The lighting of the forest is all from above, and as *Margaret*, the artist's dream daughter, cried out in the uncanny darkness, "I don't want to be a Might-have-been," the effect, wholly achieved by manipulation of the lights, is that of peering into a wood of impenetrable depth.

Again in the third act, the play opens with a darkened stage. One of the characters finds the switch, the lights spring up and from then on to the end the stage is flooded with more and more light.

The credit for the effectiveness of the lighting of the scenes of "Dear Brutus" has been given to several people, including some who had absolutely nothing to do with it. Iden Payne, stage director, and Homer Emmons, the scenic artist, had something to do with it, but the ideas and suggestions that they worked out came from Alf Hayman, general manager for Charles Frohman, Inc., under whose personal supervision the production was made.

ONE OF THE DADDIES.

Although Edwards Davis of the Bachelors Club in David Belasco's production of "Daddies," now in its fifth month in the Lyceum Theatre, is perhaps best known to theatregoers across the footlights, he has by no means confined his talents exclusively to acting. Not only has he won distinction as a dramatist and producer, but previous to his stage association he was a well known minister in the West.

A native of California, Mr. Davis displayed such marked oratorical ability in his academic days that he donned the cloth soon afterward and served in several Illinois pasterates as well as in his native State. After several years, however, he decided that the stage held a wider field for him than the pulpit, so he left the ministry to embark upon a new career.

It was twenty years ago this month that Mr. Davis played his first part, that of the *Viceroy of India* in "The Cherry Pickers" at the old Third Avenue Theatre. This led to his engagement with Charles Coghlan, with whom he appeared in "Citizen Pierre" at the Fifth Avenue three months later and the following season in "The Royal Box." He then became leading man with William Morris in "The Adventures of Lady Ursula," in which he toured the principal cities.

The first of Mr. Davis's plays to be produced was "The Seventh Commandment," in which he assumed the principal role, supported by Robert Downing. The next four years were busy ones for him, for during that time he played more than 100 principal roles with various companies.

Like many other prominent players Mr. Davis then entered the vaudeville ranks, appearing in a one act tragedy from his own pen called "The Unmasking." His reception was so phenomenal that he played this act more than 1,000 times, finally succeeding it with another sketch, "All Rivers Meet in Sea," of which he was also the author. This, too, enjoyed marked favor, having been presented over 500 times before two a day audiences.

Answering to the call of both actor and author again, the public next saw Mr. Davis in his own dramatization of Oscar Wilde's novel, "The Picture of Dorian Grey," which added another to his already long list of successes. Of recent years vaudeville has claimed Mr. Davis almost exclusively, and there is scarcely a prominent vaudeville theatre from coast to coast in which he has not appeared in his own playlets.

CHARLES AND MOLLIE KING in "GOOD MORNING JUDGE"

ERNEST TRUEX & EDITH TALIAFERRO in "PLEASE GET MARRIED"

LEO DITRICHSTEIN & LILY CAHILL in "THE MARQUIS of PRIOLA"

ERNEST GLENDINNING & PEGGY HOPKINS in "A SLEEPLESS NIGHT"